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Stage Mother

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STEPHANIE PIPPIN

Stage Mother

In every way my daughter is my husband's child.
I could never love her. Newborn,
she scratched like a cat in my arms.
The first time I saw her I asked *Is she normal?*
Then I shut my eyes.

I wanted a girl: pliable hands, clean
under the nails. My own hands are tremendous
and jeweled. I hit her when she tries to bend
my will. I have to be taught
not to hit. I have to think *eggshell, eggshell,*
little bird. Why does she pick
and eat the paint? Why does she stare?
I want her to be still and meek as milk.

It is true she can move me: the arch
of her foot, her curved cheek.
The way she can make a grand entrance.
Tonight she cradles the baby, solemn Mary
in a school Nativity. Tender is her love
for the audience, wide her arms
for the audience. Their cries carve me out.